

THE DRAMA
—OF THE—
NINETEENTH *
* CENTURY.

A LECTURE BY
VOLTAIRINE de CLEYRE.

Delivered before the Pittsburg Secular
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THE DRAMA OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

BY VOLTAIRINE DE CLEYRE.

The passions of men are actors, events are their motions, all history is their speech. In the long play of the ages a human being sometimes becomes an event; a nation's passion takes a *personnel*. Such beings are the expression of the gathered mind-force of millions.

He only who keeps himself aloof from all feeling can remain the spectator of the hour. All that humanity which is held within the beating, coiling, surging tides of passion, it has no individuality; it sinks its personality to become a vein in the limb of this giant, a pulse in the heart of that Titan. Only when out of the spirit of the times the event is born, only when the act is complete, the curtain rung down, only then does the intellectuality of the vein, the pulse, rise to the level of the dispassionate. Only then can it survey a tragedy and say, "this was necessary"—a reaction, and say, "this was inevitable."

Yet as a drop of blood is a quivering, living, flashing ruby beside the dead, pale pearl of a stagnant pool, so is one drop of feeling a shining thing, a living thing, beside the deadness of the intellect which judges while the heart is stone; beside those quiet bayous of brain which reflect back the images before them very purely, very stilly, giving no heed to the great rushing river of heart that rolls on, hurries on so close beside them. Bye and bye, bye and bye, the river reaches the grand, great sea, and the waters spread out calm and deep, so deep that the stars of the upper sea, the lights of the higher life, shine far up from them as a babe smiles up into its mother's eyes, and up still to the distant source of the light within the eyes.

It is to men and women of feeling that I speak, men and women of the millions, men and women in the hurrying current! Not to the shallow egotist who holds himself apart and with the phariseicism of intellectuality exclaim, "I am more just than

thou;" but to those whose every fiber of being is vibrating with emotion as aspen leaves quiver in the breath of Storm! To those whose hearts swell with a great pity at the pitiful toil of women, the weariness of young children, the handcuffed helplessness of strong men! To those whose blood runs quick along the veins like wild-fire on the dry grass of prairies when the wind whirls aside the smokings of the holocaust, and, courting the teeth of the flame, the black priestess, Injustice, beckons it on while her feet stamp on the cinders of the sacrifice! To those whose heart-strings thrill at the touch of Love like the sweet, low musical laugh of childhood, or thrum with hate like the singing vibration of the bowstring speeding the arrow of Death! I speak to those whose eyes behold all things through a haze of gray, or rose, or gold born of their surroundings, and which mist slips away only when the gaze is leveled on that dead Past whose passions and whose deeds are ended: to whom the present is always a morning with the dimness of morning around it—the past clear and still—no veil on its face, for the veil has been shredded asunder.

For he only who intensely perceives the nature of his surroundings, he, and he only, who has felt, and keenly felt, all the throbs and throes of life, can judge with any degree of truth of the action of that which is past. You, you who have loved, you who have joyed, you who have suffered, it belongs to you to people the silent streets of the silent cities with forms now vanished, to comprehend something of the passions which animated their action; it belongs to you to understand how the fury of a great energy, striking terrible aimless blows in the dark, may yet, across the chasm of awful mistake, touch the hand of a greater Justice.

If from a panoramic survey of the past some wisdom may be gathered, then let the dramas of old ages tell us what have been the mainsprings of their motions; so we shall understand what action ushered in the drama of the nineteenth century.

"Westward the Star of Empire holds its way." Following the course of those majestic spheres of fire which whirl each in

his vast ellipse, trending away in a long, southwesterly path athwart the heavens, obedient to that superior attraction which through all the universe holds good, the attraction of greater for lesser things, the tide of life upon our world has risen and swelled and rolled away to the south and west. Away in the orient source of the sunlight, away where the glitter of ice shines up to meet the morning, nations have risen and plunged down impetuously over the sleeping regions of darkness and of heat, bearing with them the breeze-stirring life of the north and the on-trending light of the east. And out of this conquered earth have arisen the mixed passions of another life and another race. Still the governing stars wheel on, and the tide of life which paused only to gather strength rolls up again; and once more a nation is born, and new passions dictate the action of the peoples. Down, down it sweeps over the Altaian hills, over the Himalayan ranges, over the land of the Euphrates and Tigris, over the deserts of Arabia the barren, the fields of Arabia the stony, and the grasses and waters of Arabia the happy, to those low shores, the home of dark mausoleums and darker pyramids, on to the now classic land of Greece, and golden Italy and the home of the dark-eyed Moors. Sweeps till it touches the frothing sea, and brightly borne upon its upper crest shines the glory, the splendor, the magnificence of the warring powers which dictated the action of Greece and Rome. For centuries their hosted spears send back the burnished glitter of the sun, and then—the light dies out; down rushing from the North-land again the tide of vigor pours, and the health and strength of barbarism conquers the weakness of a tottering civilization! Far away—away over the miles of sparkling sea, in the darkness and the silence a continent lies waiting; waiting for the coming of the light, waiting for the swelling of the tide. Slowly at last a ripple creeps up over the strange beach, and the flood rolls on, and again a continent becomes a cradle, and the Empire Star sends on its rays to kiss the forehead of the rising world. Over the breadth of all our continent that mighty wave is flowing still.

Standing to-day almost upon the threshold of another world,

and looking back down this long-vista'd past, gradually there dawns upon Reflection's vision, gradually there grows out of the confusion of forms and the Babel of sounds, a clearer perception of the motor powers which have dictated the action of this past, a better idea of the grand plot which, driven by these motor powers, the passions are working out. For, above the long procession of scenes and events, above the monster massings of happiness and woe, above the War and Peace of centuries, above the nations that have risen and fallen, above the life and above the grave, the winged and shadowy embodiments of two great ideas float and rest. And those two principles are called Authority and Liberty; or, if it please you better, *God* and Liberty. The one is all clad in the purple and scarlet of pomp and of power, while the other stands a glorious shining center in the white radiance of Freedom.

Yet not always; far back in time Authority stood on thrones and altars, with the plumed sables of despotism waving on his brow, while in his hands he held two iron gyves, the one to fetter thought, the other to fetter action; and these two gyves were called *the Church and State*.

Liberty! Ah, Liberty was then a name scarcely to pass the lips; dreamed of only in solitude, spoken of only in dungeons! Yet out of the blackest mire the whitest lily blooms! Out of the dungeon, out of the sorrow, out of the sacrifice, out of the pain, grew this child of the heart; and pure and strong she grew until the sabled plumes have tottered on the despot's brow, and a great palsy shakes the hands that once so firmly held the gyves of Church and State. For, ever seeking to overthrow each other, the one for the aggrandizement of self, the other for the love of all mankind, these two powers have contended; and every energy, every passion, every desire, good or evil, has been ranged on this side or on that, blunderingly or wisely, and nations have swung to and fro in their breath as upon a hinge. And one by one the powers of Authority have been crippled, and step by step Liberty has advanced, until to-day mankind is beginning to measure the forces that, struggling blindly together,

are yet evolving light, to drink in the sublime ideal of freedom. Yet, oh, how long the struggle with vested ignorance, with greed in power !

When upon the Drama of the Nineteenth Century the curtain rose, Liberty, triumphant on the younger shores, lay prone and hurled in Europe. Against fifteen centuries of crowned and throned and tithed curse and woe unutterable, she had risen with such a fearful convulsive strength that when she had mown down king, priest and throne, and gorged the guillotine with blood, she sank back, exhausted from the struggle, and the hated tyrant rose again. The wild desire to conquer, to possess, to control, to hold in subjection, seemed to dominate with an unconquerable strength, and the gathered mind-force of millions of people wrought itself into the single brain of Napoleon Bonaparte. This human being became an event—this nation's passion took a *personnel*! The spirit of the times produced this man, and Authority smiled as one after another the despots of Europe plotted and planned only to be overthrown by this incarnation of Ambition, while the scenes were shifted from the Vine-land to the Rhine-land, from the sun-land to the snow-land, and through them all the great event glowed out, lit high by the rust-red light.

How well the plot was working ! The Empire triumphant, nations subjected, the fetter of action closing its terrible teeth ! Liberty manacled on the left ! The armies of God massing their forces—advancing—preparing to close down the iron jaw of the iron gyve upon the right; to imprison thought, to re-establish the union of fetters, to link up the broken chains, to burden human hope and human will and human life once more with the awful oppression of Church and State !

But Liberty will not, cannot die ! Wounded and bruised and pinioned sore, condemned to the use of instruments that were none of hers, she wrought with England's jealousy, with Wellington's emulation, with fear, with love, with hate ! Impelled by one motive or another the nations of the coalition moved in concert. Napoleon had been Marengo—he had been Austerlitz ! He became Waterloo ! And when across that awful field rolled the

last long cannon boom, when the silence settled, when the Quick and the Dead lay sleeping and the Wounded died, Justice and Suffering touched hands across the gulf of blood, and Liberty heard them whisper, "*Sic semper tyrannis.*" In the tableau that followed, she, the ideal of our dreams, still stood pale and fettered; but a smile lit up her face and a light gleamed in her eyes as she saw Authority reel and stagger from the blow which, though it did not sever, yet shattered half the strength of both its fetters.

For the strength of God lies in a vast unity, an ownership of ideas backed up by the brute force under the command of the individual in whom that ownership of ideas is vested; while the strength of Liberty lies in the very essence of things themselves, the fact that no law or force ever *can* destroy the individualities of existence; and of necessity the natural tendency to break all bonds which seek to control thought, and all force which locks up those bonds entailing liberty of action as the outcome of liberty of thought. And just in proportion as Churches have been dismembered and States have been broken up, no matter that each new Church and each new State were but another form of despotism, just in that proportion has the principle of liberty been served; for each new religious establishment has been an assertion of the right to think differently from the fashionable creed, each change has been a movement away from the centralization of power.

So with Waterloo in the background, with Authority lashed to impotent rage before it, and Liberty pinioned, yet with the lit smile still upon her countenance, the tableau light flames up and dies, and the curtain falls upon the first great act. Those who think, those who feel, those who hope, know why that smile was there. For looking away over the long blue roll of water that swelled like an interlude between, she beheld the sublime opening scene of the act that followed.

Far up the wonderful stage the distant mountains lift their circling crests, at their feet the waters sweep like a march of music, vast acres of untrodden grass-land shower their emerald

wealth, nearer the front the lower hills rise up, and then, the short Atlantic slope, all rife with busy life, bends down to meet the sea. On the right the hoar-frost sheens and shines on the majestic northern forests, while the glittering earth, dipped in its bath of frozen crystal, spreads like a field of diamonds; on the left the white flakes of the orange bloom fall like a shimmering bridal veil, the wind floats up like a perfume, and the hazy, lazy languor of warmth creeps all about. Behind it all, behind the hills and the prairies and the lifted summits, the mystical golden light of the west drops down, filling the dim-lit distance with the glory of promise. The silver light of the Empire Star glides over the Atlantic slope, and its rays, like guiding fingers, point onward to the gathering shadows.

Now the Passions of men begin to move upon this vast platform with an energy never before witnessed. Diverted from their old-time channels of struggle against the oppression of Gods and kings and the bitterness of birth-hatred, with a freedom of opportunity denied in the old world, and with such unstinted natural resources waiting for the magic transformer, the genius of humanity, Ambition of power, Avarice, Pride, Jealousy, all those motors born out of the old *regime* of a State-propped God, bred and multiplied through generations till they have come to be looked upon as natural laws of human existence, begin to work together to plant this untrodden earth, to sow in its furrows the seed of a newer race—and, paradoxical as it may sound, to work for their own destruction, their final elimination from the human brain. Or perhaps it were more correct to say, that, with the barriers of old institutions taken away they naturally begin their retransformation into those beautiful sentiments from which they were originally warped, distorted, misshapen by that warped, distorted, misshapen idea called God. So do they inaugurate the grand era of development; so do they answer the oft-repeated question, “What incentive would there be for labor or genius if the institutions that compel them to struggle were broken down?” Look at the stage of the past and see! Never before had thought been so free, never before had ability

been less cramped, or starved or less compelled ! And never before did genius dare so much for purposes so great; never before did the engines which drive the tide of life along a continent send forth a stream of so much vigor. A new light breaks along the pathway of the star, and swells and rolls and floods the great scene with a dawn-burst so magnificent that the very hills blush in its rising splendor. It is the dawn which the night of God so long held shrouded; it is that which is born when Superstition dies; it is that Phoenix which rises from the ashes of religion; it is that clear blent flame of all the great forces of nature, brought to the knowledge of mankind by delving Reason, and shot like northern streamers from the heart of her the Church of God so long held throttled—Science ! It is that which shone reflected in the eyes of Liberty when pale and manacled she stood before the field of Waterloo ! The ray of the under earth came up to join the ray of the clouds shot down, the energies of sky and mine and sea were clasped to bring down the wealth of the mountains to the shore, and to transport the life of the now populous strip of slope to the unclaimed regions of the west.

In the broad blaze of light the scene is shifted, the golden effulgence melts and flows round that sea-girdled kingdom, where quietly but surely the two great engines of Authority are being shriven apart. The dynasties of kings are growing dusty—much of their power is but a legend; the Church is shrinking in her garments. The desires of this people are slow to move, but deeply rooted and strong; and so far as they have moved forward, they have never moved back. There have been no gigantic strides, no reactions. Little by little the idea of divinely-delegated power has been crippled till the English bishop and the English lord have become mere titled mockeries in comparison with their ancient feudal meaning. But stop ! Close lying there, almost beneath her stretching shadows, another island flashes like a green star in its sea-blue setting. And from that island there rises up the cry of a great devotion, clinging blindly to its greatest curse, its priest-hedged God, while persecuted even unto death by the fanaticism of another faith; and the pleading of

Hunger while day long and night long the shuttle flies in the flax loom, and the earth yields her golden fruition, only to lade the ships that bear it away from the famine-white lips and the toil-hardened hands that produced it. Blindly Devotion prays to its God, that God whom it calls all-wise, all-powerful and all-just, and the English lord, who cannot thus subdue his own countrymen, reaches out the long arm of the law across the channel for his rent—and, with God looking on, it is given; and still while the hollow-eyed women kneel at the altar for help, the scene widens out, and away in the distance the seven-hilled city lifts up from the sea, and from the dome of the Vatican, from that great mortared hill of God, the Vicar of Christ calls out, “My tribute, my Peter pence!” And with God looking on, it is given! And then from the foot of that tear-stained altar, where so many lips of Woe have pressed, where so many helpless hands have clasped, where so many hearts have broken, comes the ironical promise of Jehovah, “Ask and thou shalt receive.”

Oh, God is a very promising personage indeed—very promising, but, like some of his disciples, very poor pay.

Liberty! Shadowed, invisible! Yet a muffled voice is repeating the words which not so long ago rang from the lips of one who stood almost beneath the shadow of the scaffold, who walks to-day in prison gloom:

“Ye see me only in your cells, ye see me only in the grave,
Ye see me only wand’ring lone beside the exile’s sullen wave!
Ye fools! Do I not also live where you have sought to pierce in vain?
Rests not a nook for me to dwell in every heart, in every brain?
Not every brow that boldly thinks erect with manhood’s honest pride?
Does not each bosom shelter me that beats with honor’s generous tide?
Not every workshop brooding woe, not every hut that harbors grief?
Ha! Am I not the breath of life that pants and struggles for relief?”

Ah, poor, panting, struggling, misery-laden Ireland! How God laughs with glee to see his shackles weight your misery!

The scene is shifting, the stage is dark’ning—a strange eclipse obscures the shafted light! Darker, darker! Now a low, red fire gleams like a winking eye along the foreground; it runs, it hisses like a snake; there another leaps up, there another; France, Germany, Italy—the continent blazes with the fires of the Commune! That spirit which, drunken with blood, reeled from the

guillotine at '93, to be crushed beneath the upbuilding of the Empire, has once more arisen. And out of the hot hells of Fury, and Jealousy, and Hate, out of the pitiless struggle between "vested rights" and wrongs with high ancestral lineage, and the great outcry of a piteous ignorance against an oppression whose injustice it feels but cannot analyze, grows the sublime idea which priests have anathematized and States have outlawed —"the sacred dogma of EQUALITY."

In so far as that ideal was made possible of conception, in so far as the masses began to understand something of the causes of their ills, in so far the purpose of Liberty was served: no matter that the arms of Oppression were triumphant, the dawn of the thought of equal liberty upon the mass of the unthinking was a far greater victory than any triumph of arms.

So when the fires died down, and the low reflection gleamed for an instant over those quiescent Indian valleys and Altaian ranges, where the main plot of old centuries had been laid, and then paled out before the white flare lighting the tableau of the second act, Liberty stood with chained hands lifted toward her enemy, while a proud look, playing like an iridescent flame in her eyes, said, plain as lips could speak it, "I have unbound their thoughts; they will one day unbind my hands."

Slowly the curtain falls on the fair prisoner and the glowering God.

The solemn ocean interlude rolls in again; again the rising curtain shows the curving slope, the rock-romance of hills, the wide, green valley with its threading silver, the sweeping mountains with the mirage of the blue Pacific lifted high in the sky behind them, the frosted pines, the orange groves. Moving upon the nearer stage two great masses of humanity are seen facing each other; the fires of ambition, of stubborn pride, of determination for the mastery flash like flint-sparks in the eyes of both. Rage is gathering as the stage-light darkens!

Yet these two opposing forces are not all. From under the groves of bridal bloom comes a mournful, chant-like requiem; under the bloom four million voices cry in pain; upon the

darkened faces, upturned to that darkening sky, fall the white petals helplessly, as Hope falls on the faces of the dead—to die beside them. In the beautiful land of the sun four million human beings clank the chains of the chattel slave! Ah! what music!

Liberty! Liberty was a wraith, fleeting ghost-like through the lonely rice-swamps, terrible *ignis fatuus* of the quagmire, strange, mystical, vanishing moon-shimmer on the darkly ominous waters lying so silent, so level, beneath the droop of Spanish moss and cypress! There it was they drove thee, *there*—**THERE**—where the quaking earth shivered with its branded burden, where the fever and the miasm were thy breathing, and thy sacred eyes were dimmed with winding-sheets of mist that floated, O so dankly, O so coldly, a steam of tears that rose as fast as their dews might fall: there wast thou exiled, Thou, the God-hunted, Thou, the Law-driven, **THOU, THE IMMORTAL!** Yet, Oh, so dear men love thee, Liberty, that even here in thy last terrible citadel of woe, Humanity linked arms with Death, and wooed thee still! Wooed thee, with the ringing bay of blood-hounds in its ears; wooed thee, with the wolf of hunger gnawing at its throat; wooed thee with the clinging miasm winding its anacondine folds around its fever-thin body; wooed thee with the dark pathos of a dying eye, while the diseased and hungered limbs lay stiffening in their agony. And thou wast true, O Liberty! Out of thy bitter exile thou didst call to them, and point them on to hope; and thou didst call, too, to those strange-eyed dreamers, whose faces shone amidst the rank and file of those dominated by local Hate alone, as shines a clear star among driving clouds. Against them Authority has hurled his curses. Spit upon by the godly, despised by the law-abiding, they yet have dared to say to Church and Law, “Think what you please of me, but free the slave.” Aye, the Church persecuted, and the law hunted down, and for the love of God, men set traps to catch their fellow-men: even the “wise men,” the wise men at Washington, against whose mandates it is treason to speak, aye, a matter for the scaffold in these days, even the wise men built a

trap to uphold the divine institution and sent it forth to the people labelled, "The Fugitive Slave Law;" and as in other days, human beings died for their opinions—but *the opinions did not die*. Has not one of our latter-day martyrs said, "Men die, but principles live?"

See! The light which has been slowly fading from the right and left shines with a frightful brilliancy upon one point: North and South lie darkened, but Harper's Ferry glows! There is a wild, mad charge, a shifting of the light, a scaffold, a doomed old man bending his grand, white head, to mount the fatal steps with a child-slave's kiss yet warm upon his lips, and then—only a dull, lifeless pendulum in human form, swinging to and fro. And the Church and the Law were satisfied, when those dumb lips were cold, and the dead limbs were stiff, and God and Harper's Ferry had no more to fear from old John Brown.

But the Church and the Law have not always been wise; they have not always understood that the martyrs *to* Creed and Code have done as much by their death for the propagation of their principles as the martyrs *of* creed and code; and God and the State sowed a wind whose reaping was a terrible whirlwind, when they hung John Brown.

Across the dim platform the Passions of hate and pride move toward each other; it is the old combat of the forces of Authority, each contending not for the vindication of right, but for the maintenance of power over the other. It is a terrific struggle of brute strength and strategy and cunning and ferocity, and well might those who conceived the ideal beautiful of freedom, shrink horror-struck from the blood-soaked path their feet must tread to reach it. Not strange if some should pause and shudder and cry out, "Is it worth the sacrifice?" But up from the dust where Hope lay trodden, and out of the trenches where the sacrificed lay hid, and over the plains all scarred with bullets and plowed with shells, breathed the whisper, "It is not vain." It was not in vain; for as at Waterloo the struggle of ambition against ambition defeated the first purpose of Authority, the centralization of power, and gave a partial victory to her whom both

hated, so Antietam, Fredericksburg, Vicksbury, Gettysburg, while in themselves representing only the brutish struggle of opposition, based on the desire to domineer, really wrought out the victory of that ideal which dwelt in the minds of those anathematized by God and outlawed by the State. For when the hot lips of the iron mouths grew cold, Liberty forsook her lonely fastness, came forth upon the desolated plain, and mounting still to the summits of the blue-hazed hills looked away over the ruined homes, the depopulated cities, the gloom-clouded faces, and though her tears fell fast, an ineffable tenderness shone upon her features as the torrent of pale light flowed round her form, defining its snow-whiteness in relief against the sable of four million freedmen smiling o'er their stricken chains.

Swiftly following the tableau fire comes the eastern scene, where, in the very center of its power the Church is shaken by an invader, and Garibaldi becomes the *personnel* of the event. Then follows the Conclave of the Vatican, where by that singular logic known to the Roman Church the vote of fallible beings renders the pope infallible; upon the heels of this, the breaking of that strong tooth of the Church in the expulsion of the Order of the Society of Jesus by the German Reichstag, and the overthrow of kingcraft in France.

The curtain falls. Behind, the scene is being prepared for the last great act!

And now, in the interval of waiting, let us think. So far we have been surveying the completed. While we can understand something of the passions which animated this past, can feel something of the pulsations which throbbed in its arteries, flowed in its veins, we yet can speak of it without over-riding emotion either upon one side or the other. The river of heart has reached the sea—the troubled waters have spread out deep, and up from their depths shine the still reflections of those great lights which gilt the stages of the past. Calmly now we can look at the reaction from the French Revolution to the Empire, and say, "This was inevitable,"—of Napoleon's fall, "this was necessary;" of the awakening of Science, "this was a natural result;" of the

uprising of the '48, "this was the premature birth of an idea forced upon the people by the oppression of Authority;" we can forget the choking agony of John Brown, and declare his death a victory. We can look upon the awful waste of blood in the civil war and say, "it was pitiful, but the goblet of woe must needs have been spilled full of the red life wine, ere the hoarse and hollow throat of tyranny were satisfied." We can see where each of the contending principles have lost and gained, and measuring the sum totals against each other, *must* decide that the old despotism is losing ground; that instead of the supreme authority of God the supreme sovereignty of the Individual is the growing idea.

But now we have come to a stage where we can no longer be cool spectators. In what happens now we too must be part and parcel of the action; we too must hope, and toil, and struggle and suffer. We are no longer looking through the clear still atmosphere of the dead: around our forms the wheeling mists are circled, and before our eyes the haze lies thick—the haze of gold or the haze of gray. The dimness of the "yet to be" befogs our sight, and the rush of hope and fear blinds all our faculties. You who stand well upon the heights of love, of comfort, of happiness, heeding not the darkness and the sorrow beneath you, behold, with up-east eyes, the great figures of God and Freedom wound about, showered with light. To you there is no menace in their darting eyes, there is no purpose in their full-drawn statutes, there is no jarring in their clarion voices. No! for your senses are stupid in your luxury, your brains are dulled, too dulled to think, your ears are glutted with the ring of gold. In your vain and foolish hearts you dream that what you see there is a shadowy bridal; that there, at last, Religion and Science, Statecraft and Freedom are meeting to embrace each other.

Ah, go on book-makers, press-writers, doctors and lawyers and preachers and teachers! Go on talking your incompatibilities; go on teaching your absurdities! Dream out your short-lived dream! At your feet, beneath the shadow of your capitols and domes, under the tuition of your few-facted, much-fictioned liter-

ture, from out your chaos of truth-flavored lies, from before your pulpits, your rostrums and your seats of learning, something is growing. Something that is looking *you* in the eyes, that is analyzing your statements, that is revolving your institutions in its brain, that is crushing your sophistries in its merciless machinery as fine as grain is ground between the whitened mill-rollers. Freethought is looking at you, gentlemen!—more than that, it questions you, it puts you on the witness-stand, it cross-examines you. It says, “Do you believe in God?” and you answer, “Yes.” “Do you believe him to be omnipotent, omniscient, and all-just?” “Certainly; less than this would not be God.” “Then you believe he has the power to order all things as he wills, and being all-just he wills all things according to justice?” “Yes.” “Then you believe him to be the impartially-loving father of all his created children?” “Yes.” “And each one of those children has an equal right to life and liberty?” “Yes.” Then look upon this earth beneath you, this earth of beings whose lives are of so poor account to you, and tell us, where *is* God, and *what* is he doing?

Everyone has a right to life! What mockery! When the control of the necessities of life is given to the few by the State, and over above the seal of the law the priest has set the seal of the Church! Verily,

“You do take my life
When you take that whereby I live.”

Is this your Divine Justice?

What irony to tell me I am free if at the same time you have it in your power to withhold the means of my existence! Free! Will you look down here at these whose sight is shadowed with the ebon shadow of despair, these, the homeless, the disinherited, the product of whose toil you take and leave them barely enough to live upon—live to toil on and keep you in your luxury! You, the monied idlers, you, the book-makers and the journalists, who do more to cry down truth, to laud our social lies, our economic despots and our pious frauds than any other propaganda can! You, the doctors, whose drugs have cursed the world with

poison-eaten bodies, corroded the health of unborn generations with your medicated slime, and when the sources of life have yielded to the hungry body so poor a stream that for lack of air, and earth, and sun, and food, and clothing, and recreation, it drooped and sickened, have bottled up some nauseating stuff, and with oracular wisdom have taught them to imagine it could undo what years of misery had done! You, the law-makers, who have twisted Nature's code till to be natural is to be a criminal; you, who have lawed away the earth that was not yours to give; you, who even seek to charter the sea and make the commandment "across the middle of this river thou shalt not go unless thou render tribute unto Caesar!" you, who never inquire "what is *justice*," but "what is law?" And you, the teachers, you who prate of the glory of knowledge as the remedy for the evils of the world, and boast your compulsory law of education, while a stronger law than all the wordy sentences ever graven upon statute books, is driving the children out of the schoolground into the factory, into the saw-mill, into the shaft, into the furrow, into the myriad camps of toil, to the dust of the wheel, to the heat of the furnaces, till their pallid cheeks and bloodless lips are bleached like bones beneath the desert sun, and their clogged lungs rattle in their breathing pain! Will you look at these, the under-stratum of your social earth, and tell them they are *free*? Will you tell them ignorance is their greatest curse and education their only remedy? Will you say to these children, "We have provided free schools for you, and now we compel you to attend them whether you have anything to eat and wear or not?" Will you tell these people there is a good, kind, merciful God who loves them, meting out justice to them from the skies?

No, you *will* not, you *cannot*. The words will die upon your lips ere you have uttered them.

Do you know what it is they see up there above you, they whose eyes look through the mist of gray and the shroud of darkness? They see your God of justice a pitiless slave-driver, his Church more brutal than the lash, his State more merciless than the bloodhound; they see themselves a thousand million

serfs more hopelessly enthralled, more helplessly chained down than e'en the lashed and tortured body of the chattel slave. For them there is no refuge, no escape; in every land the Master rules; no fugitive slave law need now be passed—there is no place to flee—the whole horizon is iron-bound. White and black alike are yoked together, and the master yields no distinction, shows no mercy. The bare pittance of existence is the meed for him who toils, and for him who *cannot*—starvation! with a preacher to help him die! That is the justice that they see there, in the shadow lines above your golden haze. And they see, too, a conflict preparing between those two antagonistic forces such as never before the world has witnessed. They see your God concentrating his strength to fight so bitter a battle with Liberty as shall crush the spirit of individuality forever from the race. They see him ranging his forces, those forces blood-imbrued through all the anguished past, the blacklist, the club, the sword, the rifle, the prison, aye the scaffold; they see them all, and know that ere your God will yield his vested rights, the noblest of the race will have been stricken, the most unselfish will have been tortured in his dungeons, the white robes of innocence will have been reddened in her own martyr's blood, and Death will have shadowed many and many a home, unless *you* shall hearken to the voice of Liberty and save yourselves while there is yet time. They see the wide stage spreading out, they see the passions moving over it; they see there, in the center, beneath the rolling brilliance of the Empire Star, the tragic inauguration of the act! They see a grim and blackened thing, a silent thing, the demoniac effigy of Torquemada's spirit, the frozen laugh of the Dark Ages at our boasted civilization; they see twelve stolid fools before this Nineteenth Century gallows; they see the hiding-place of that thing masquerading under the sacred name of Justice, which shrinks even from the gaze of the lauding press and the imbecile jurymen, and does unknown its deed of murder; they see four shrouded forms, they hear four muffled voices, a broken sentence, and—an awful hush! And then, O crowning irony of all, they see advancing to speak to them over the bodies

of the murdered (and mouthed back from a hundred pulpits comes the echo), Jehovah masked as Jesus. Ah, the divine cowardice of it! Mild is the light in the Nazarene eyes, tender the tone of the Nazarene voice!

“Ah, people whom I love! For whom my life was given long ago on Calvary! What rashness is it that you meditate? Is it that you are weary of the yoke of love I lay on you? Is this your faith? Have I not promised you a sweet release when your dark pilgrimage on earth is o'er? Exiles ye are upon this world of pain, and if oppression comes to weigh you down, if hunger shows his long fangs at your hearth, if your chilled limbs are cramped with bitter cold the while your neighbor hoards his fuel up, if you are driven out upon the street with crying children clinging piteously and begging you for shelter from the storm, if your hard toil is taken by the law to satisfy a corporation's greed, if Fever and Distress gnaw at your heart and still you tread the weary wine-press out, knowing no rest until the death-hour comes; if all these things discourage and perplex, know 'tis for love of you I order it. For thus would I point you to paradise, win you from all the pleasures of the world, and fix your hopes on Heaven's eternity.” “Whom the Lord loveth, him he chasteneth;” so then it is for love that these things are. For love of you I press your life-blood out; for love of you I load you down with pain; for love of you I take your rights away; for love of you I institute the law that slaves you to the grasping millionaire; for love of you I pile the glutted hoards of Vanderbilt and Gould and Rothschild and the rest; for love of you I rent the right to breathe in a poor tenement of dingy dirt; for love of you I make machines a curse; for love of you I make you toil long hours, and those who cannot toil, I turn adrift to wander as they may—sons into dens where thievery is learned as a fine art; daughters to barter their virginity till competition forces down the price of lust and death is left them as a last resort. Ah, what a golden crown, and sweet-toned harp, what a resplendent white robe, wait the soul whom so God loves while on the earth it dwells. Aye, for the love of you these men were

murdered, and for my glory; and through my holy love they roast in hell: for they would take away the instruments whereby I lure you to my blest abode. They would have taught you what your freedom meant; they would have told you to regain your rights; they would have contradicted my commands and lost you heaven, perchance—and if not heaven, *hell*. Keep to your faith, my people, trust in God! Break not the altars where your fathers knelt; trust to your teachers, keep within the law; bow to the Church and kiss the State's great toe! So shall good order be observed, obeyed, and as “Peace reigned in Warsaw,” so anon shall “Peace, good-will to man reign on the earth.”

These are the words that fall from the lips of him you call “the merciful,” “the just.” These are the sounds that sink into the ears of those upon whose toil *you* are dependent for your existence; judge you how they will be received. And now, you, the dwellers on the lifted heights, listen to the voice that follows him, for these are words that concern *you*, and if you listen to their warning you may yet save yourselves the desolation and the ruin that otherwise must come. This deep, bell-pealing voice that echoes through the corridors of thought till almost Death's chill sleepers might arise again, is the voice which called for centuries to the Empire, “Cease your oppressions or the people rise;” and to the Kingdom, “Curse not the new world with your tyrannies, it will rebel;” and to the Master, “Put not the lash upon your bonded slave, for the time will come when every stroke will rise like, a warrior armed, to burn and waste and kill.” The Empire laughed, the Kingdom ignored, the Planter sneered; but the time came when laugh and sneer died to white ashes. The time came when “France got drunk with blood, to vomit crime,” when England “lost the brightest jewel in her coronal,” when the South waded in blood and tears and knelt her pride before a conqueror. And now, she, the liberator, the destined conqueror of God, calls out to you, “Yield up your scepters ere they be torn from you; give back the stolen earth, the mine, the sea! Give back the source of life, give back the light! for a black,

bitter hour is waiting you, an awful gulf unfathomed in its depth, if now you do not pause and render *justice*.

Ah, thou, whatever be thy awful name, which like a serpent's trail hath marked the earth, whether Jehovah, Buddha, Joss, or Christ? Thou who hast done for *love* what others do for most envenomed *hate*, how hast thou hated these the happy ones. Is this impartial justice then to these, to pour the golden treasures of the earth into their laps, that these may feast and toast and so forget thee and thy promised heaven? Truly thou hast been most unkind to them, since kindness means with thee a tearing out of e'en the heart and entrails of existence. Bah! how thou liest! To what most pitiable trick of speech hast thou been forced! Think'st thou the dwellers in the darkness longer take thy creed of crystalline deception! No!! They laugh at thee, they spew thee out, they spit at thee.

Love! Say! Look—this long procession coming here! Here are the murderers, with their red-hued eyes; here the adulterers, with their lecherous glance; here are the prostitutes, with their mark of shame; here are the gamblers, with their itching hands; here are the thieves, with furtive lips and eyes; here are the liars with their dastard tongues; here all the train that Crime can muster up reviews before thee! And after them, a ghastly, fearful sight, follow the victims of their blackened hearts, slain, ruined, desolated by thy love! And now, behold, another train comes on—a train whose name is legion! Here the dark, bruted faces from the mines, here the hard, sun-browned cheeks from out the furrow, here the dull visage from the lumber-camp, here the wan eyes from whirling factory, here the gaunt giants from the furnace fire, here the tarred hands from off the stream and sea, here all the aching limbs that stand behind the fashionable counter, here, O pitiful sight of all, those whose home is in the street, whose table is the garbage pile, the vast, helpless body of the unemployed. And, ever as they march, they drop, and drop, into the earth that swallows them, and over their graves the march goes on. These are thy victims, God! These are the creatures of thy Church and Law! Speak no more

of the breaking of alters, thou who hast broken every altar that the human heart holds dear! Take thy position at the head of the murderers' column! And when thou hast marched away into the past, thou and thy preachers and thy praters of justice, then will the world *return* to justice and the great law of Nature reign upon the earth. Then will her broad, green acres yield their wealth to him who toils, and him alone; then will the store-houses of Nature yield her fuel and her light, not to the corporation whose high-priced lobbying can buy it, for in that time no wealth nor intrigue can purchase the heritage of all, but to all the sons and daughters of Labor. And then upon *this* earth there shall be no hungry mouths, no freezing limbs; no children spending the hours of youth in gaining a miserable livelihood, no women crying,

“ It’s Oh, to be a slave
Along with the barbarous Turk,
Where woman has never a soul to save
If this is *Christian* work!”

no men wandering aimlessly in search of a master for their slavery.

But O, careless dwellers upon the heights, awaken now!—do not wait till reason, persuasion, judgment, coolness are swept down before the rising whirlwind. Bend your energies *now* to the eradication of the Authority idea, to righting the wrongs of your fellow-men. Do it for your own interest, for if you slumber on—ah me! ye will awaken one day when an ominous rumble prefaces the waking of a terrific underground thunder, when the earth shakes in a frightful ague fit, when from out the parched throats of the people a burning cry will come like lava from a crater, “ ‘Bread, bread, bread!’ ” No more preachers, no more politicians, no more lawyers, no more gods, no more heavens, no more promises! “ Bread! ” And then, when you hear a terrible leaden groan, know that at last, here in your free America, beneath the floating banner of the stars and stripes, more than fifty million human hearts have burst! a dynamite bomb that will shock the continent to its foundations and knock the sea back from its shores!

“ It is no boast, it is no threat,
Thus History’s iron law decrees;
The day grows hot! O Babylon,
‘Tis cool beneath thy willow trees!”



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